

**PRESS RELEASE**

Text of the D.O. letter dated 12.12.2013 addressed by **Selvi J Jayalithaa**, Hon'ble Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu to **Dr. Manmohan Singh**, Hon'ble Prime Minister of India is reproduced below:

"You would recall that I have written to you on numerous occasions bringing to your notice the repeated instances of abduction and apprehension of innocent Indian fishermen belonging to the coastal Districts of Tamil Nadu by the Sri Lankan Navy while pursuing their peaceful livelihood of fishing in their traditional fishing waters. I had sought a strong diplomatic response from India to prevent the recurrence of such incidents. I had also been consistently pointing out that the failure of the Government of India to come out strongly in defence of the rights and interests of Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu was giving rise to disillusionment and disquiet amongst the fishermen community and raising tensions to alarming levels. The failure of India to act decisively on this issue has emboldened the Sri Lankan regime to wilfully and with impunity, prey upon the poor fishermen from Tamil Nadu.

**What I had feared appears to have come true in the latest incidents, when on 11.12.2013 the Sri Lankan Navy attempted to abduct and apprehend 47 boats with close to 325 fishermen from Nagapattinam District while they were fishing off the Akkaraipettai coast near Nagapattinam.** The abduction operation put the lives of several of these fishermen at grave risk since a major confrontation took place in the high seas. Had it not been for the fishermen acting with restraint, and avoiding a direct conflict with the heavily armed Sri Lankan Navy personnel, many innocent lives could have been lost. 110 fishermen in 15 boats quietly surrendered to the Sri Lankan Navy, while 32 boats with 215 fishermen turned back and returned. The Sri Lankan Navy has acted with extreme hostility and punitive intent. **It is understood that these 110 fishermen have been taken to Trincomalee for further legal action.**

No sooner did the State Government get the details of this shocking incident from the Coastal Security and Intelligence sources, we are now informed that, **in yet another incident the Sri Lankan Navy has apprehended 30 fishermen in 8 boats from Tamil Nadu who ventured for fishing from the Jagathapattinam fishing base of Pudukkottai District in the early hours of 12.12.2013.**

**These are the largest and most outrageous acts of mass abduction of our fishermen by the Sri Lankan Navy. Such brazen and**

**near warlike acts could not have been carried out without the tacit approval of the Sri Lankan Government. India's prestige and image has suffered grievous damage. The entire fishing community in Tamil Nadu has lost its faith in the ability of the Government of India to protect the lives and livelihood of innocent fishermen in the high seas.** Surely, we cannot continue our facile 'do not touch policy' in the face of these audacious and high handed acts that violate the lives and livelihoods of our fishermen anymore?

I earnestly hope that the Government of India would wake up to the reality of the situation at least now and come up with a concrete course of action to resolve this issue. There has to be an immediate strong, diplomatic initiative including intervention at the highest level. **The Sri Lankan High Commissioner in New Delhi must be summoned to the Ministry of External Affairs and our strong protest lodged. Mr. Prime Minister, Sir, you must personally take up this issue with the President of Sri Lanka without any further delay.** Failure to take immediate action would be disastrous for the livelihood of the fishermen community in Tamil Nadu. It will also lead to flaring up of socio-economic tensions with the potential to snowball into a major law and order and security issue.

May I urge you to immediately bestow the much needed attention that this extremely volatile, emotive and sensitive issue deserves and to act decisively? The Government of India should not allow this issue to fester anymore through continued inaction or through a weak-kneed and timid approach towards the Sri Lankan regime which continues to perpetrate outrage upon outrage upon innocent Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu pursuing their livelihood.

**The fishermen community in Tamil Nadu is in a highly agitated mood and we expect quick and decisive action by the Government of India to ensure that the 23 fishing boats and 140 fishermen apprehended by the Sri Lankan Navy in the past 24 hours are released forthwith without detention. May I also remind you that another 69 fishermen from Tamil Nadu are already languishing in Sri Lankan Jails and their 47 boats with equipment are still in Sri Lankan custody?**

I request your immediate intervention and response.

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